

Message Text

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DEPT PASS ICA FOR VOA

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINS, CG
SUBJECT: SHABA ATTACK: VOA CORRESPONDENT'S REPORT ON MOBUTU TRIP TO

KOLWEZI

BECAUSE OF COMMERCIAL COMMUNICATIONS CIRCUIT DIFFICULTIES EN-
COUNTERED BY VOA CORRESPONDENT, EMBASSY HAS CONSENTED TO TRANSMIT
FOLLOWING REPORT:
VOA WASHINGTON
NCA
CORRESPONDENTS REPORT
JOHN ROBERTS/KOLWEZI

MOBUTU TO KOLWEZI

INTRO: ZAIRE PRESIDENT MOBUTU SESE SEKO AND FOREIGN JOURNALISTS
FLEW TO SOUTHERN SHABA PROVINCE THURSDAY TO VISIT THE AIRPORT AT
KOLWEZI JUST ONE DAY AFTER IT WAS RE-CAPTURED FROM INVADING INSURGENT

FORCES. VOA'S JOHN ROBERTS WAS THERE AND HAS THIS REPORT FROM
KOLWEZI:

TEXT: MACHINE GUN AND MORTAR FIRE COULD BE HEARD IN THE DISTANCE AS
PRESIDENT MOBUTU AND A CORP OF REPORTERS MADE A HURRIED SURVEY OF
THE DESTRUCTION AT KOLWEZI AIRPORT.

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NEXT TO THE PARKING APRON, THREE FRENCH ALOUETTE HELICOPTERS
LAY IN CHARRED HEAPS OF TWISTED METAL AND ASHES, THE GROUND
AROUND THEM SCORED BY FIRE. ACROSS THE TARMAC WERE TWO ITALIAN
MACCHI JET WARPLANES, COMPLETELY DESTROYED -- FOUR OTHERS
BADLY DAMAGED. TEN LIGHT AIRCRAFT WERE ALSO IN RUINS.

IN A NEARBY FIELD, LAY A HEADLESS CORPSE IN UNIFORM, BUT IT
WAS DIFFICULT TO TELL WHETHER HE WAS ZAIRE ARMY OR REBEL.

JOURNALISTS AND CAMERAMEN DISPERSED AROUND THE AREA, WHILE PRESIDENT MOBUTU SURVEYED A BOMBED OUT BUILDING AND OTHER DAMAGE SITES. PARATROOPERS STOOD IN A TIGHT PERIMETER AROUND THE AIRFIELD, THEIR M.16 RIFLES LOADED, COCKED AND AIMED AT THE FLAT SCRUBLAND IN THE DISTANCE. SPENT 16 AND 30 MILIMETER SHELLS LITTERED THE GROUND AND THE RUNWAY AREA.

KOLWEZI AIRPORT WAS RE-CAPTURED IN A LIGHTENING STRIKE WEDNESDAY BY THE FRENCH-TRAINED ONE HUNDRED AND TWELFTH PARATROOPER DIVISION.

THE ZAIRE NEW AGENCY SAID THE BATTLE LASTED BETWEEN THREE AND FOUR HOURS, BUT GAVE NO DETAILS OF CASUALTIES.

KOLWEZI AIRPORT WAS OVERRUN BY REBEL FORCES CALLED KATAGANESE GENDARMES ABOUT TEN DAYS AGO AND AT ONE POINT, KOLWEZI ITSELF ABOUT THREE KILOMETERS AWAY WAS REPORTED TO BE PARTLY IN REBEL HANDS. THE PRESENT MILITARY SITUATION IN AND AROUND KOLWEZI REMAINS UNCLEAR,

WITH CONFLICTING REPORTS ON ALL SIDES IN THE CAPITAL CITY OF KINSHASA.

KOLWEZI IS THE NERVE CENTER OF ZAIRE'S COPPER MINING INDUSTRY, WHICH YIELDS SIXTY FIVE PERCENT OF THE COUNTRY'S FOREIGN EARNINGS. ABOUT ONE YEAR AGO, REBEL FORCES ATTACKING SHABA PROVINCES FROM NEIGHBORING ANGOLA DROVE TO WITHIN SEVENTY FIVE KILOMETERS FROM KOLWEZI, BUT WERE EVENTUALLY DEFEATED BY ZAIRE ARMY FORCES BACKED BY MOROCCAN TROOPS. THE RE-CAPTURE OF KOLWEZI AIRPORT COINCIDED WITH THE EVACUATION OF 77 AMERICANS FROM KOLWEZI BY TRUCK AND HELICOPTERS TO A CITY IN ANOTHER PROVINCE.

THEY WERE ATTACHED TO AN AMERICAN COMPANY BUILDING A GIANT UNCLASSIFIED

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POWER LINE PROJECT LINKING HYDROELECTRIC DAMS ON THE LOWER ZAIRE RIVER WITH THE MINING COMPLEX AT KOLWEZI.

ALSO ON WEDNESDAY, ZAIRE'S RULING POLITICAL PARTY STAGED A MASS RALLY AT KINSHASA STADIUM TO SHOW SUPPORT FOR PRESIDENT MOBUTU.

DURING THE ZAIRE PRESIDENT'S INSPECTION OF KOLWEZI AIRPORT TWO C-130 TRANSPORT PLANES KEPT THEI ENGINES RUNNING, READY FOR A QUICK TAKE-OFF. THIS CAME AFTER ONLY TWENTY MINUTES ON THE GROUND WHEN THE JOURNALISTS WENT SCRAMBLING BACK TO THE PLANES AMID SWIRLING DUST AND DEBRIS FOR THE 1300 KILOMETERSTRIP BACK TO KINSHASA. SIGNED ROBERTS.

COVERAGE: EXTERNAL LINES COMMANDERED BY MOBUTU; UNKNOWN WHEN CAN FILE-SUGGEST CALL MEMLING 23260 ROOM 310 SOONEST FOR STRATEGY CONFERENCE.

ALSO APPRECIATE COURTESY CALL TO LA TIMES 213 625 0471 ALERTING THEM THAT JACK POISIE ALSO WANTS TO FILE AT SAME NUMBER AND ROOM. THEY SHOULD ASK FOR ME. REGARDS. ROBERTS. CUTLER

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